Local News

State signs security pact with software giant

By Ben Andersen
Staff writer

With more than 135,000 users on its network, the state of Delaware is charged with a difficult task of keeping hackers, scammers and all around no-goodniks out of the system.

In that situation, it's not difficult to see why the state, led by the Department of Technology and Information, recently signed an accord with computer giant Microsoft Corp. to combat computer security attacks.

Delaware is the first U.S. state to join the Global Security Cooperation Program, joining Canada, Chile and Norway in sharing information about system vulnerabilities, incident information and upcoming security updates.

Because of the 2,000 to 3,000 attempts into the state network each day, Thomas Jarrett, secretary for the Department of Technology and Information, said it is crucial to be a leader in cooperating for security purposes.

"Security and cybersecurity has to be our No. 1 hot button," he said.

Stuart McKee, national technology officer for Microsoft, said the company is in constant communication with partners through monthly conference calls, discussions when the company releases new security patches and emergency notification in case of an attack.

Training is also a critical part of the agreement, he said.

The training can be as complex as letting developers see Windows source code or as simple as holding classes reminding end user, or regular workers with average computer literacy, not to put their password on a post-it note and leave it on their monitor, McKee said. This kind of training cannot be overvalued.

"It's very important to have end user training," he said.

Jarrett said knowing in advance about security problems Microsoft is combating will give the state an advantage in protecting its network.

"Making sure that you're up to speed proactively instead of reactively is important because often there's not time to react," he said.

The state will receive advance notice of issues before the news is widely released, Jarrett said.

"Days and hours mean everything in this business," he said. "It all comes down to time."

The ultimate value of the program, which is provided at no cost by Microsoft, is the protection of information entered into the network by average users, Jarrett said.

McKee agreed.

"The public sector has incredibly important assets," he said.